

Aylwin-Foster Misunderstands Nagl's Army

Janine A. Davidson, *Defense Consultant and Adjunct Professor, George Mason University's School of Public Policy*—Brigadier Nigel R.F. Aylwin-Foster's recent *Military Review* article "Changing Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," November-December 2005, has generated a great deal of debate and controversy. Much of this debate is less than useful as it aims to discredit the authority of the author, claiming he is unqualified to pass judgment on the U.S. military. On the contrary, an outside perspective is often exactly what an organization needs—and the editors of *Military Review* seem to grasp this point. Equally unhelpful, however, is the grudging acceptance of Aylwin-Foster's assessment that the U.S. Army is incapable of adapting to the challenges it currently faces. This viewpoint belies the experience of the U.S. Army in the post-Cold War era.

Relying heavily on the book by Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (University of Chicago Press, IL, 2005), Aylwin-Foster attempts an analysis of the U.S. Army's organizational culture. Unfortunately, although the Army Aylwin-Foster describes is the same one Nagl wrote about—the Vietnam-era Army—it is, thankfully, NOT the Army in which Nagl serves. The fact that Aylwin-Foster's article was published and is being debated reflects a profoundly changed organizational culture, one that has demonstrated it is capable of learning; and one that is currently learning in Iraq.

As military historian Sir Michael Howard points out, no Army can predict the exact nature of its next war and craft the perfect doctrine in advance. What is important is that it is capable of "getting it right" once the war starts. Today's Army may not yet be a perfect "learning organization," and some parts of it may still have a cultural aversion to counterinsurgency (COIN), but the institutional changes that were put

in place after Vietnam, including the Combat Training Centers (CTC), the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), and the "get the ground truth" after-action processes have taught a generation of Soldiers how to learn and, indeed, have made this generation impatient when answers are not forthcoming. Nagl's generation—and to an even greater extent the generation after his—are simply not content to stay in their institutional lanes. The proliferation of web-based communities of practice such as <http://companycommand.army.mil> and others reflect this current "give me the answers" culture.

Having observed the profound changes in the Army culture since the end of the Cold War (including changes to doctrine, training, and learning processes made during the years in the Balkans), one must be more optimistic about the ability of the next generation to "get it" and to learn and adapt based on its current experiences. Whereas the generation before them developed most of their "muscle memory" in training for major theater war, today's lieutenant colonels and below have participated in actual other-than-major-combat operations for most of their careers, and their training has adapted. Major theater war is simply not the norm for them.

Aylwin-Foster rightly praises Army Generals David H. Petraeus and Peter W. Chiarelli, while highlighting the Marine Corps' Fallujah operation as overly kinetic. The sewage, water, electricity, trash, information (SWETI) lines of operation approach used by Chiarelli was developed through trial and error in the Balkans and passed on to a generation of Soldiers through the CTC/CALL processes. The challenge is to continue to spread the hard-learned Petraeus/Chiarelli knowledge throughout the institution—and to do so on the fly. Fortunately, the institutional mechanisms currently exist in the U.S. Army to do just that.

Healthy Attitude

Philip H. King, *U.S. SSA*—Thank you for publishing Brigadier Nigel R.F. Aylwin-Foster's article.

Although I disagree with some of his conclusions, it is great to see that at least part of the Army has a healthy and productive ability to look at itself outside its own "official" press. With officers and troops able to look at all aspects, an objective fix for any part that needs it is sure to emerge . . . , and the Army [will have] a bright future.

German Support

Jürgen Weidemann, *Ph.D., Professor, Dortmund/Germany*—Thank you for publishing Aylwin-Foster's article. We Germans do not forget the Americans (and the other Allies) who liberated us from Nazi terror, but I beg that the modern U.S. Army should proceed with the Iraqis as delicately as they did with us, and I hope that the U.S. administration does not forget what we were taught (I hope successfully): democracy, tolerance, freedom, and respect for one another.

Offense Wins Wars

Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, *U.S. Marine Corps, Retired, Falls Church, Virginia*—There has been an intensifying discussion in the media concerning whether U.S. forces in Iraq should shift from an offensive policy of raids seeking to kill insurgents to a defensive policy of protecting the people. The debate has even been present at conferences on insurgency. Many advise that we must go on the defensive and focus on protecting the people if we are going to win. Framing the discussion this way shows a fundamental misunderstanding of counterinsurgency. Protecting the people is not a defensive action. In fact, it is the most aggressive, offensive action government forces can take.

Counterinsurgency is essentially about governance. If the authorities can establish effective government in an area, the people will support it. Effective government rests on two pillars: providing security for the people and hope for their vision of a better future. Both must be present. They can only be built slowly and together, but security is the base. Without security, the people cannot

help the government. That has certainly been the case in several U.S. cities where gangs control some neighborhoods. As much as the people may wish to help the police, they cannot. They know the police will not be there all the time, and the gang will. Since the government cannot provide basic security, the people cannot support the government. Insurgency presents the same type of problem.

Reorienting from attacking the insurgents to protecting the people is an offensive, not defensive, action. While this might not seem intuitively obvious, consider conventional war. When you invade an enemy's territories, seize his industrial plants, and put his people beyond the range of conscription into his forces, it is considered an inherently offensive operation. That is what you are doing when you take action to provide real security for a community. You have removed those people, their intelligence value, and their monetary

or military contributions from the insurgency's support base.

While this might sound like semantics, it is an important point. U.S. officers and NCOs know that only offense wins wars. Offense sets the tempo and agenda. Therefore we have to remain on the offense. On the surface, the numerous raids directed at locating and killing insurgents appear to be offensive. But in fact, they are essentially defensive. We are reacting to [the insurgent's] initiative. He established himself among the people and, in effect, has seized a portion of the government's resources. He is on the offense. Our raids are reacting to his initiative and are defensive. Worse, by simply raiding and leaving without establishing government in the area, we are in effect conducting a withdrawal from resources we have fought for.

In contrast, when we focus on protecting the people, we select where the fight will take place. We define the

situation and take control of resources he has been using. We are taking action to reduce his warfighting capability. Of course, the key to real protection is to never leave an area once you seize it. You must establish effective governance in the areas you have seized. Only by working with host-nation security forces can we possibly keep insurgents from moving back into an area. Finally, only by committing to a permanent, effective security presence will we ever gain the trust of the people. This will be difficult in Iraq because we have repeatedly swept through an area, announced we are staying, and then withdrawn, leaving behind ineffective, untrained government forces whom the insurgents rout.

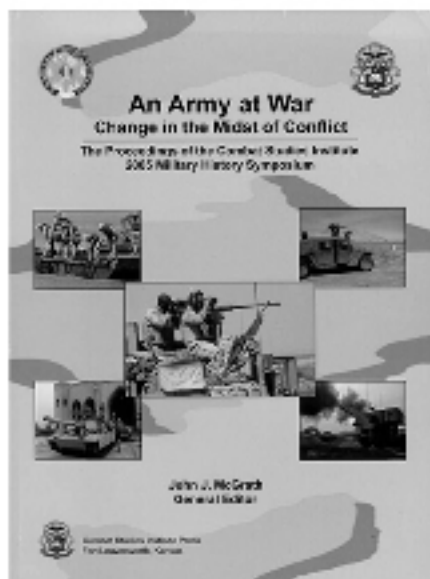
The Clear, Hold, and Build strategy is a good one, but it will only be effective if we ensure we truly hold an area after clearing it. Only by focusing on protecting the people can we ensure the area is truly held and ready to be rebuilt.



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